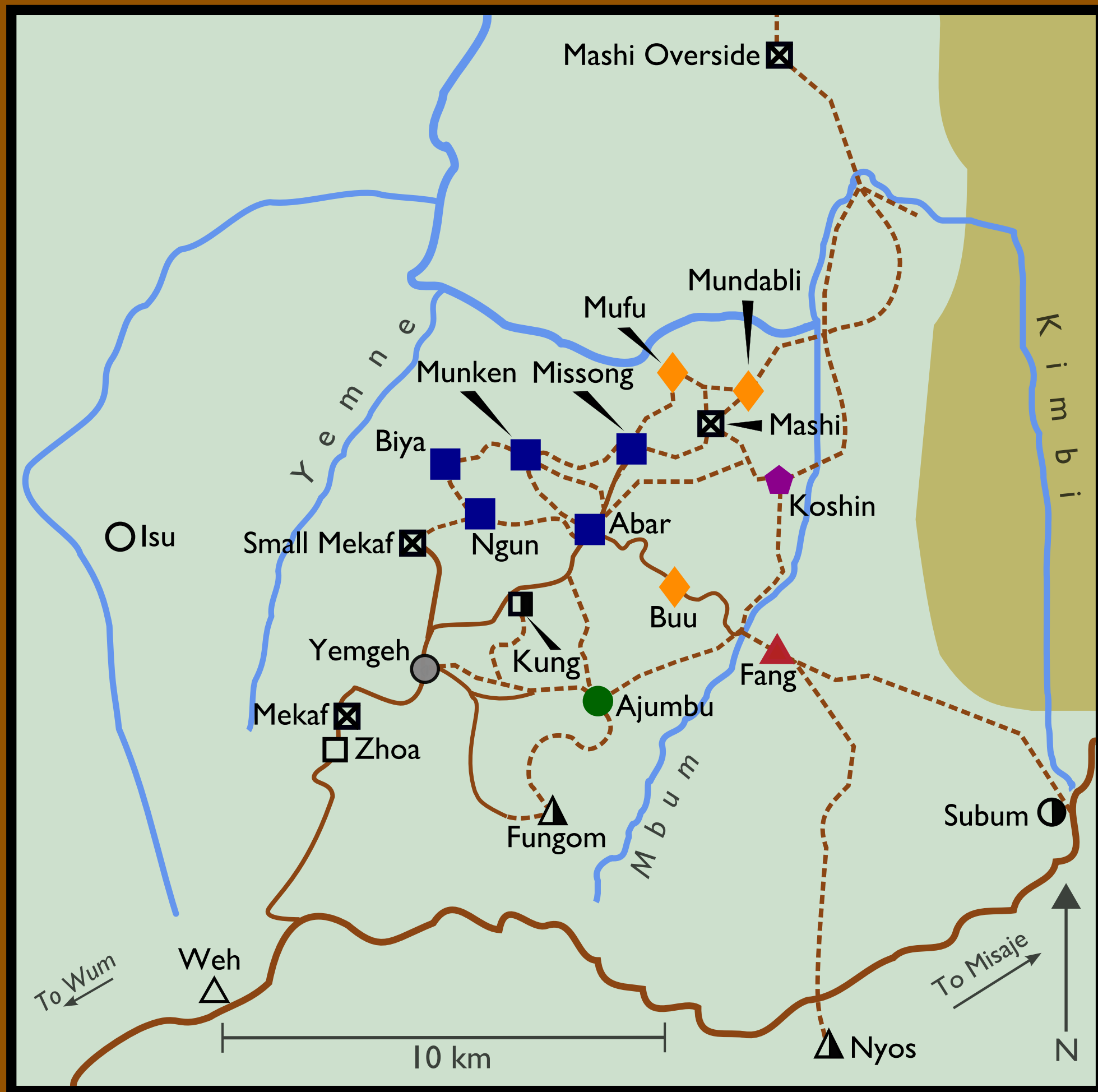


From documenting languages to documenting language dynamics: *Experiences from Lower Fungom, Cameroon*

Jeff Good
University at Buffalo

Acknowledgments

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- It builds on the results of work by Jesse Lovegren, Jean Patrick Mve, Carine Nganguép Tchiemouo, and Rebecca Voll, and, especially, Pierpaolo Di Carlo
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What's Where Why?

following Bickel 2007

What targets grammatical patterns

Where focuses on striking diversity

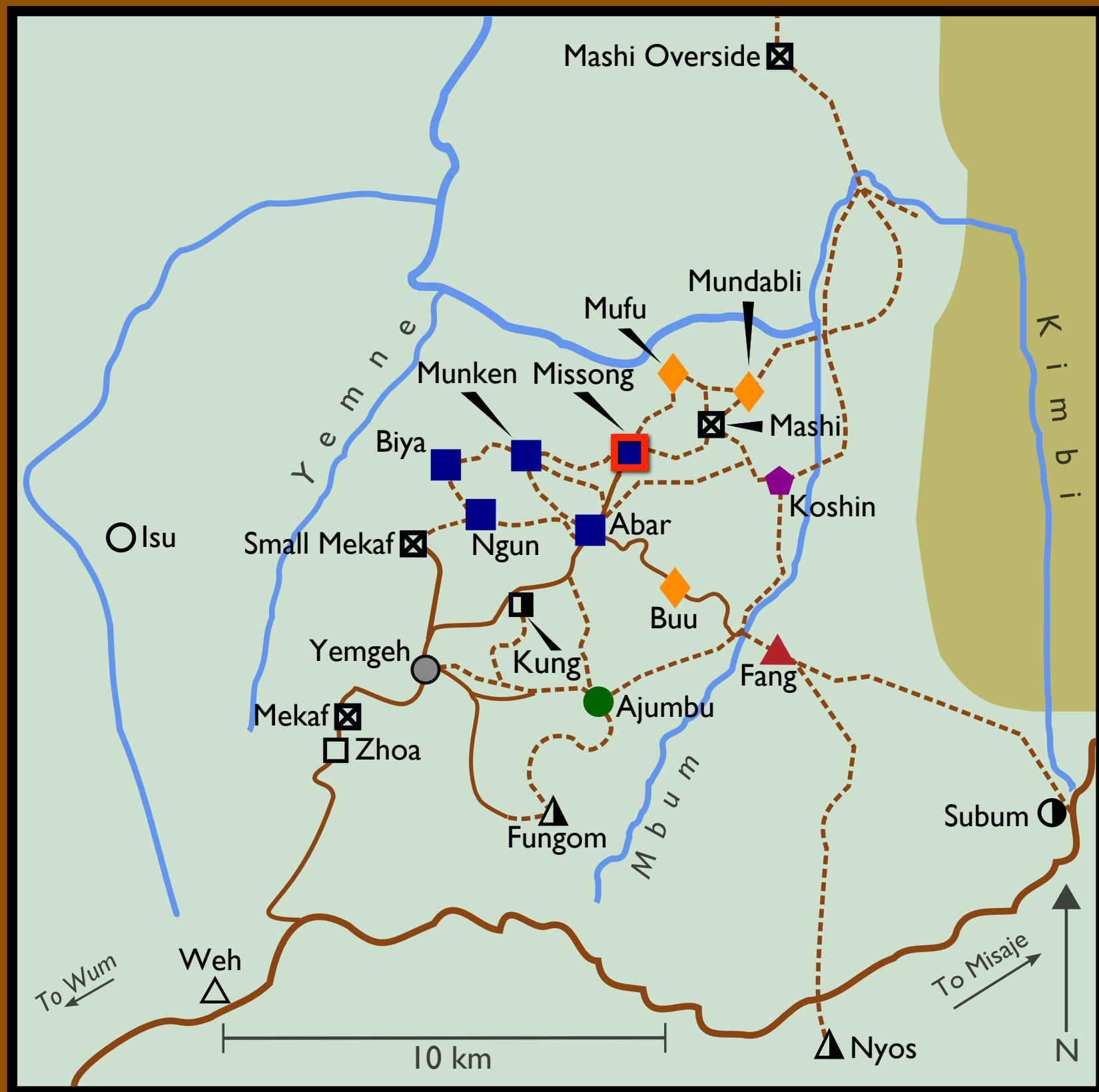
Why requires interdisciplinarity

The background image shows a group of people, likely farmers, working in a field. They are using long-handled tools, possibly hoes or machetes, to clear or cultivate the land. In the foreground, there is a large, dark, and jagged lava flow that has advanced towards the workers. The scene is set in a rural, hilly area with green vegetation in the background. The overall tone is one of a natural disaster impacting human activity.

Interdisciplinary data

Sources of information

- Comparative linguistic data
- Ethnographic investigation
- Geographic coordinates and topography
- Shallow archaeological exploration
- Also: Archival records as probe into history
- *One application: DiCarlo & Good 2013+*



Linguistic divergence

- Linguistic evidence for Missong distinctiveness
 - Lexicostatistical dissimilarity
 - Contrastive vowel length
 - Distinctive pronoun
 - Patterns of verbal stem alternation
- These differences cannot plausibly result from “natural” language diversification
- Linguistics raises the question, *Why Missong?*, but it cannot answer it on its own

Ethnographic divergence

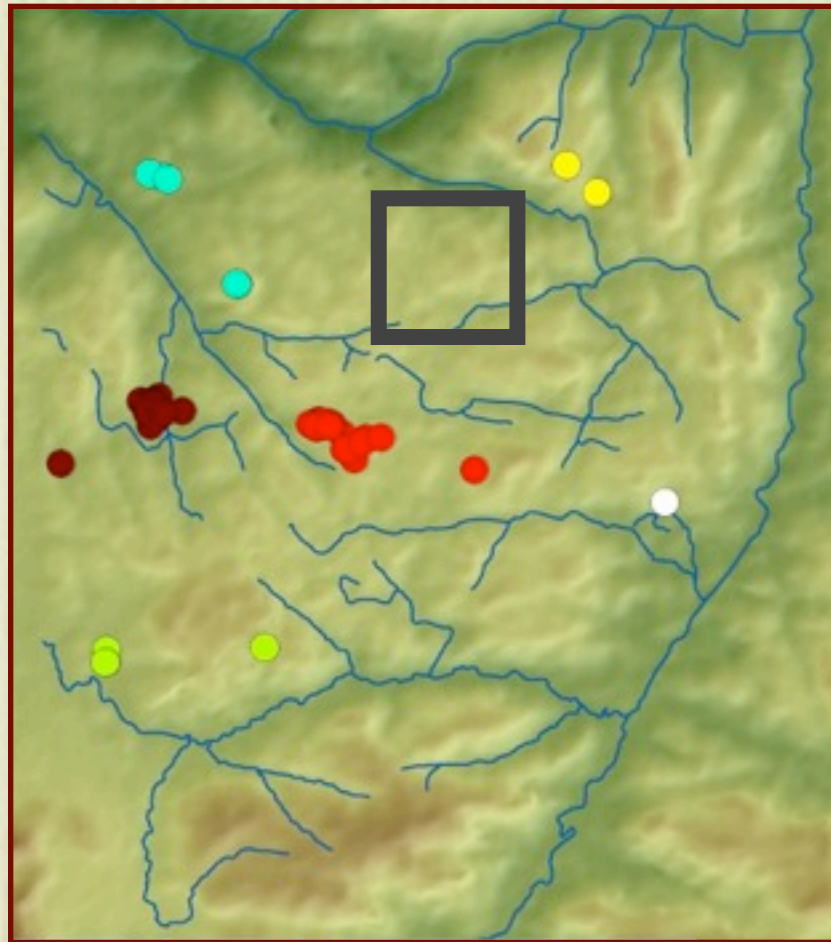
- Quarters are not exogamous
- Proliferation of ritual sites across quarters
- Lack of village-wide institutions beyond that of the chief
- Oral histories emphasize distinctive origins
- *Overall lack of cohesion*



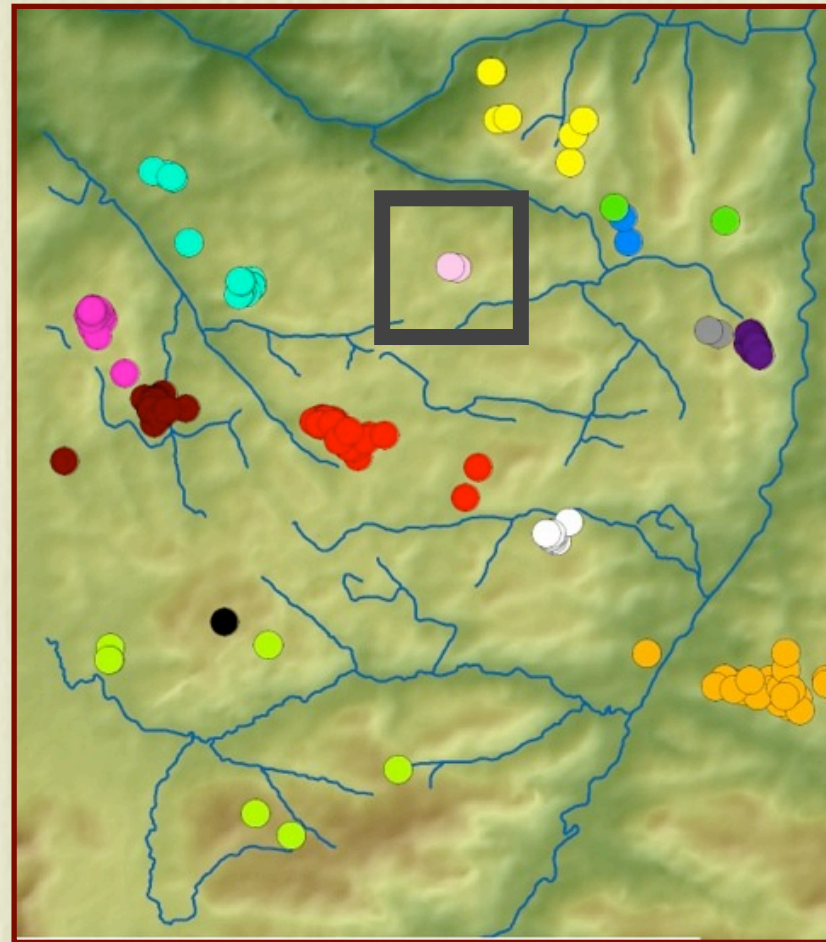
As my father told me, we were from Fang side, even in Bum side there were many of us. When you people are cooperating you speak one language, if you speak one language you cooperate. As a group of relatives moves, the brothers may decide to split, each choosing a different place to stay. This is what happened to us... Each family attached itself to a village and therefore had to speak the general language used there. For example, we Bambiam attached ourselves to Bikwom and hence had to adopt their language; Bikwom people are attached to Bidjumbi and Biandzam to form the village of Misson, and this is why they all had to use the same language, that is, Misson.

—Makpa Buo Amos

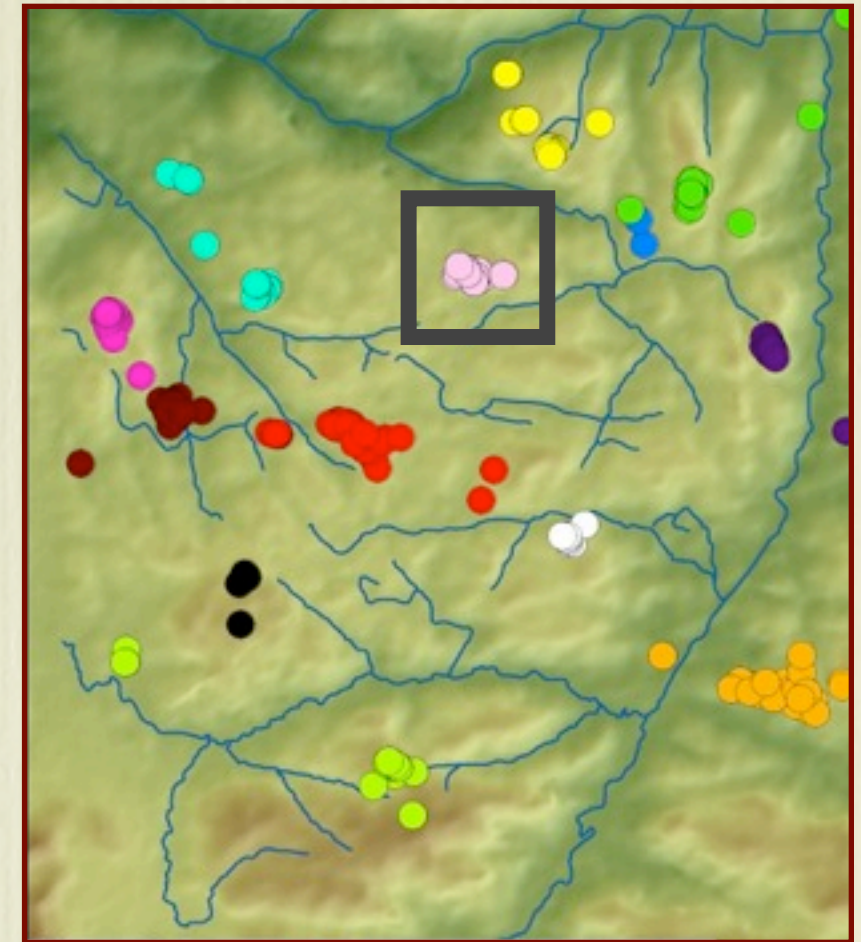
Memory places and GIS



8th century



9th century

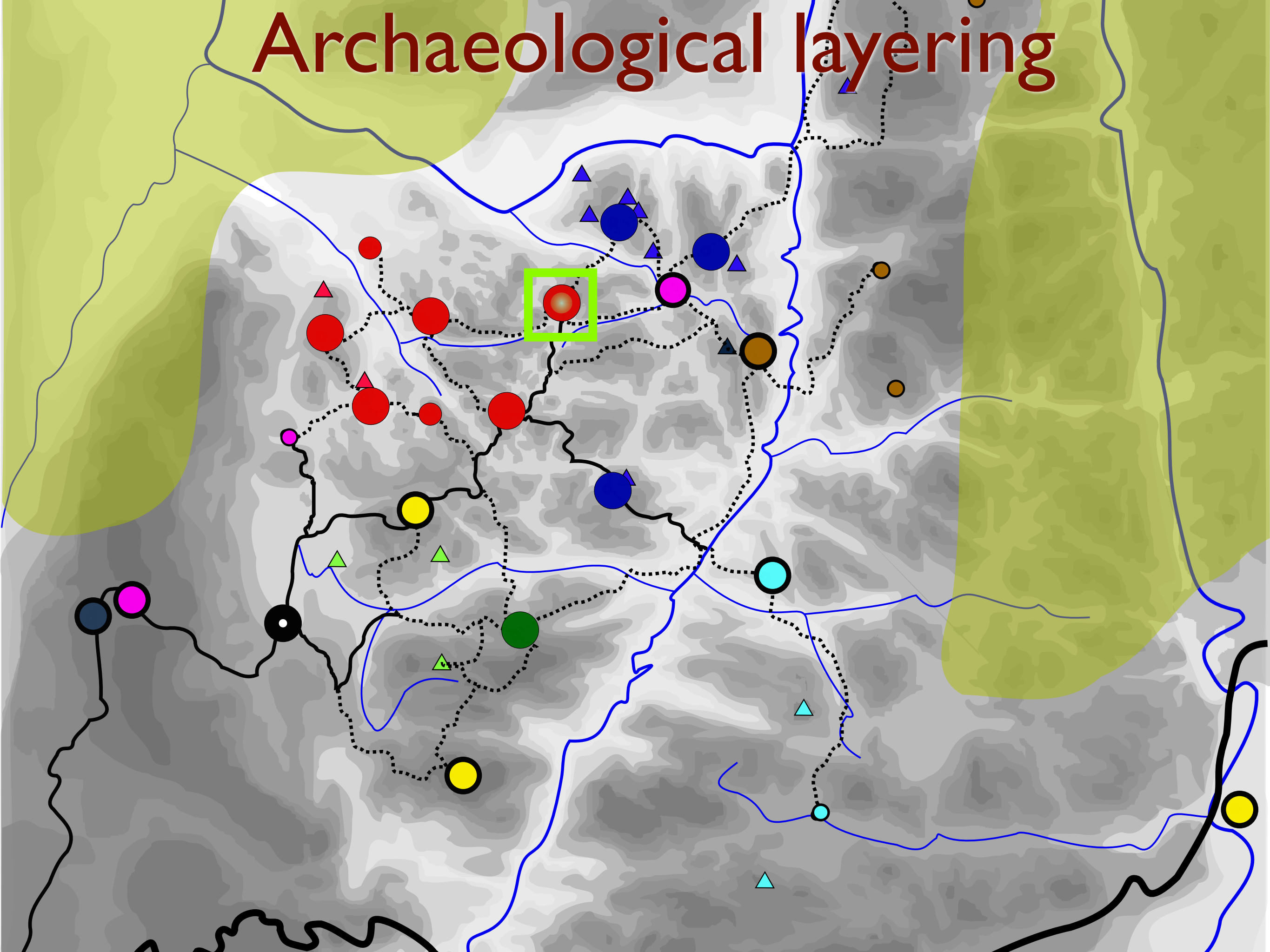


20th century

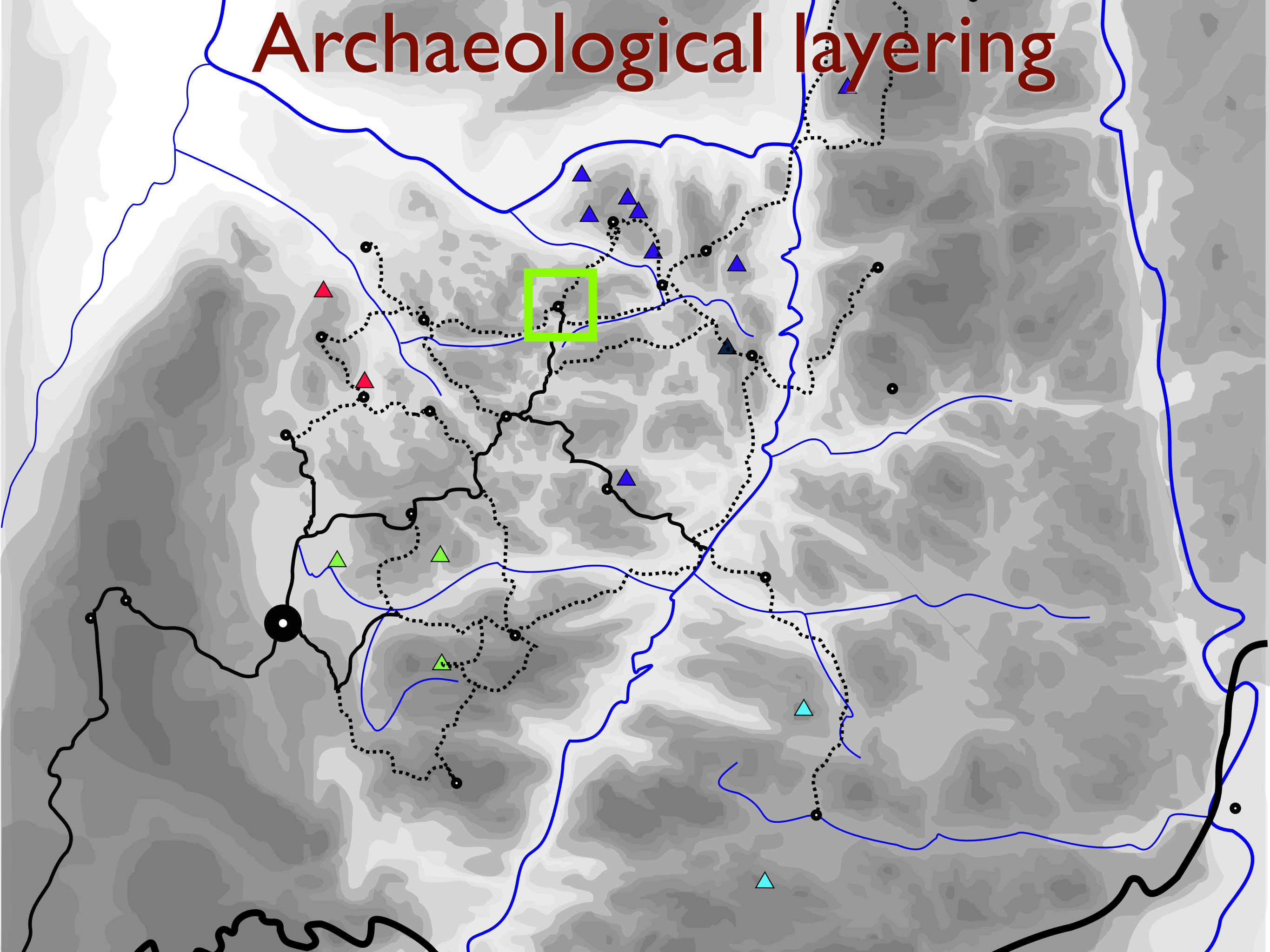
Legend		
● Abar	● Fang	● Mufu
● Ajumbu	● Koshin	● Mundabli
● Biya	● Kung	● Munken
○ Buu	● Mashi	● Ngun
	● Missong	● Nsom

DiCarlo and Pizziolo 2012

Archaeological layering



Archaeological layering



What is Missong?

- A naive approach would take “Missong” to be an ancestral/traditional/indigenous “dialect”
- Such codes are taken to be objects in need of documentation/preservation/maintenance
- But, Missong seems to be an expedient code, rather than an ancestral one
- The variety exists as part of the expression of an ephemeral political configuration
- Interdisciplinary data helps us understand *What's where why* for Missong

A photograph of a woman in a white t-shirt and a blue and yellow headscarf, with her hands raised in prayer. She is standing in front of a mud-brick wall. Two children are visible in the background. The text "Lessons from interdisciplinarity" is overlaid in the center.

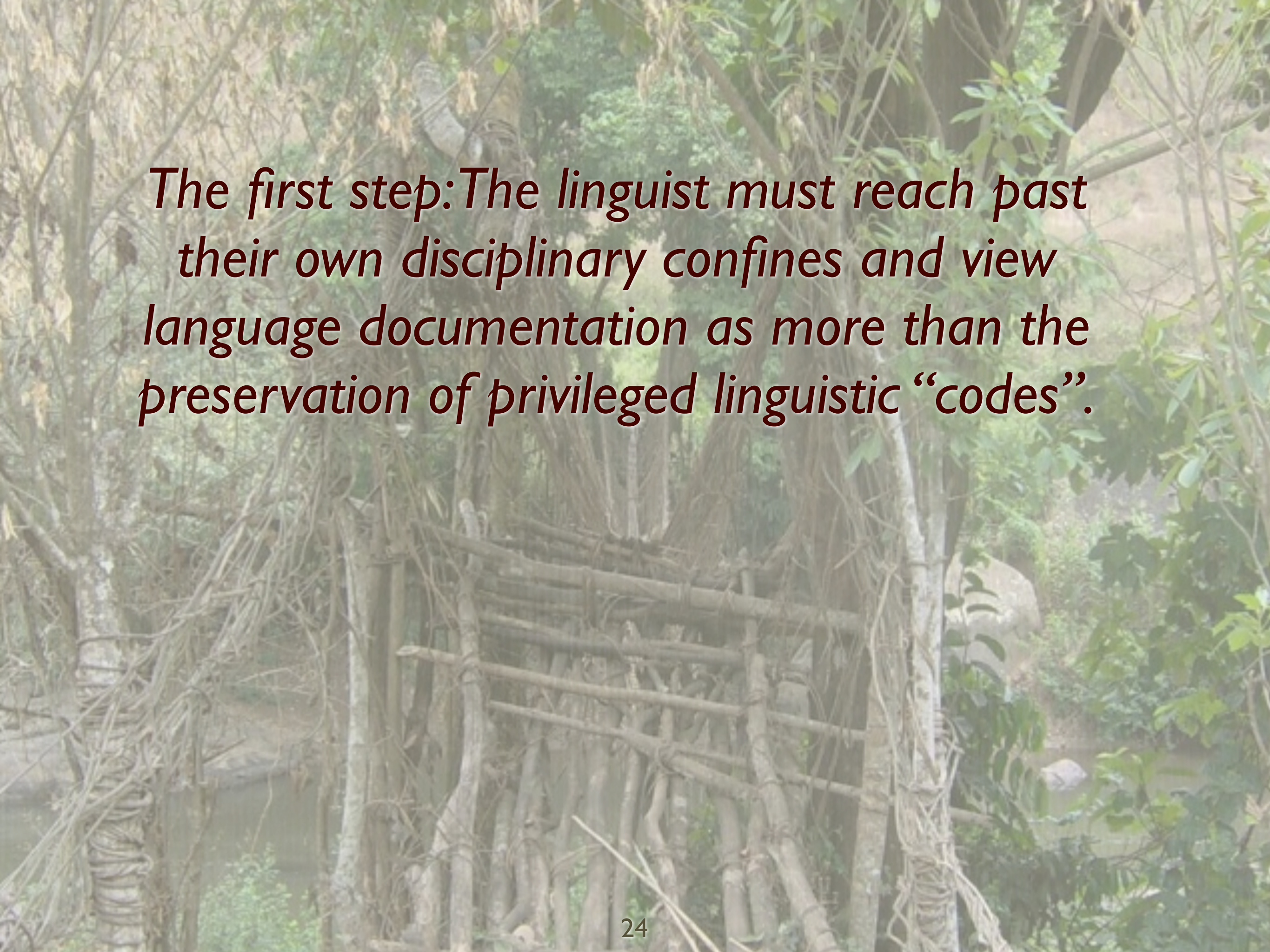
Lessons from interdisciplinarity

How interdisciplinarity?

- Our starting point: A question whose answer required **interdisciplinary data**
- *Why is Lower Fungom so linguistically diverse?*
- There was not a vague sense that, “This project needs an anthropologist.”
- Rather, we knew that **ethnographic data** would give insight to **language ideologies**
- The question placed focus on intellectual commonalities over disciplinary differences

How to start

- What did the main linguist (me) need to do to pursue this interdisciplinary research?
 - Read, read, read: Everything on the region
 - Accept that each discipline has its own methods, and focus on their strengths
 - Treat “intellectual personality” as a key qualification for research partners



The first step: The linguist must reach past their own disciplinary confines and view language documentation as more than the preservation of privileged linguistic “codes”.